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Inaugural Discourse, Delivered In
The Chapel Of Columbia College,
March 7, 1848

By
Rev. H. I. Schmidt



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INAUGURAL DISCOURSE,
DELIVERED IN THE CHAPEL
OF
COLUMBIA COLLEGE,

MARCH 7, 1848.

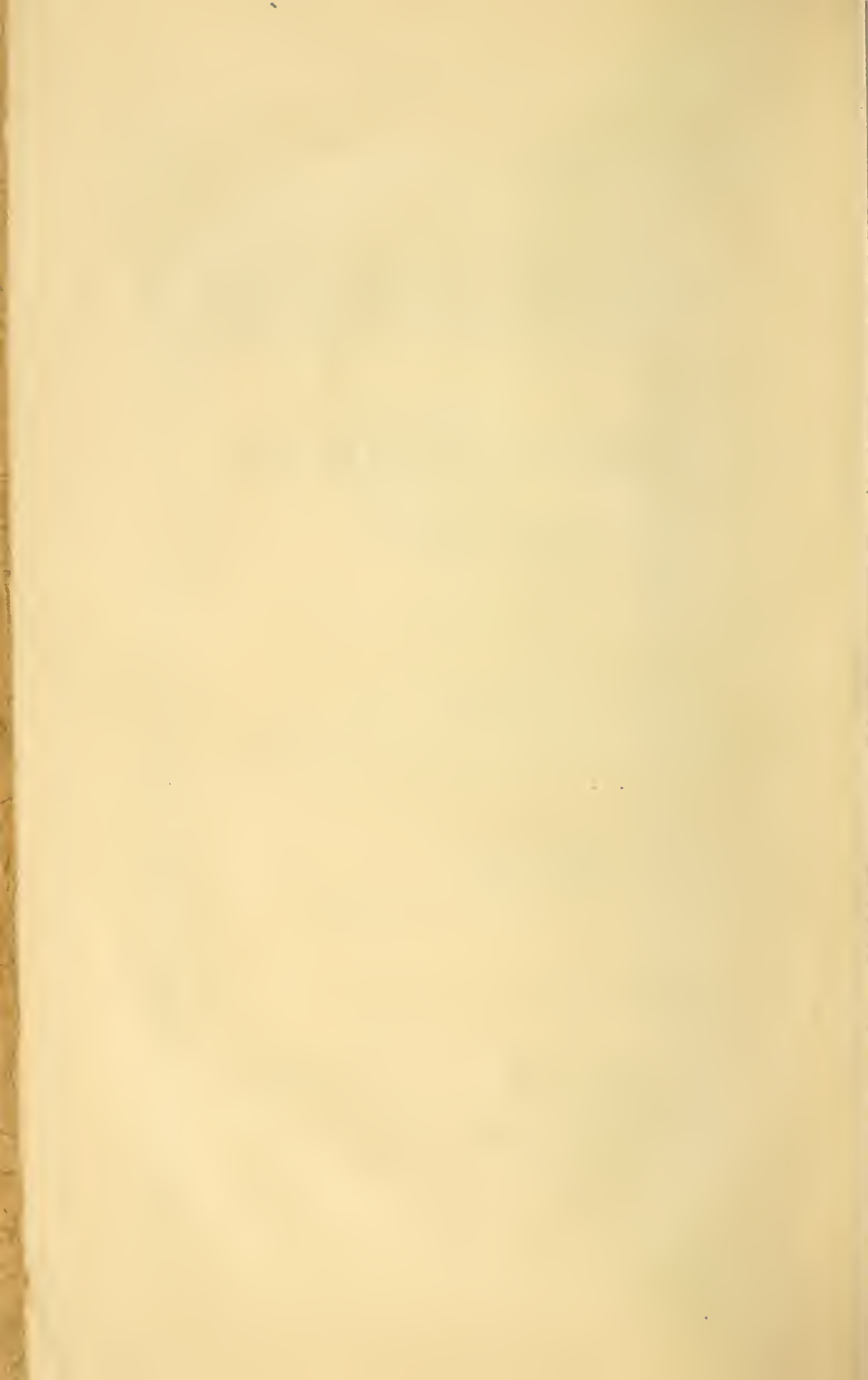
BY
REV. H. I. SCHMIDT, A. M.,
GEBHARD PROFESSOR OF THE GERMAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE.

ἀμύραι δ' ἐπίλοιποι
μάρτυρες σοφώτατοι.
Pind. Ol. I. 32, sq. Böckh.

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A D D R E S S .

IN entering upon the station to which I have been appointed at this institution, established usage requires me to commence my career of duty by pronouncing an address on some subject connected with the department of literature in which I am to give instruction. I have chosen the first subject that presented itself to my mind; for it occurred to me immediately that none could be more suitable for the present occasion, than a comparison, personal and literary, of the two men, in whom German poetry has attained its highest development; who are regarded, in their native land, as the most illustrious votaries of the German muse: I speak, of course, of Schiller and Goethe. In choosing this subject, I was by no means ignorant of its difficulties and perplexities; for I am well aware that the opinions which I shall utter are totally at variance with that public opinion, and with that almost unanimous suffrage of German and foreign critics, which have placed Goethe at the head of all German poets, and describe him as unrivalled and unattainable in his glorious art. It may not be irrelevant to state, that these opinions have not been recently formed;

they have been long entertained, being the result of increasing intimacy with Goethe's writings; and they were published to the world, in a literary magazine, long before I had the satisfaction of seeing the same views fearlessly avowed, and triumphantly sustained, by the distinguished critic, Wolfgang Menzel, in his brilliant work on German literature. And I may further obviate the charge of singularity by stating, that in Germany itself many wise and good men have, from the beginning, loudly protested against the absurd claims set up in behalf of Goethe, by his enthusiastic and indiscriminating admirers, many of whom have not scrupled to make him an object of idolatrous worship.*

Before we proceed to discuss the distinctive characteristics, and to contrast the respective merits, of the two celebrated men whom we have named, it will be necessary to state the grounds on which we shall judge them: or, in more general terms, to set forth what we require, what ought, at all times, to be required, of him, who lays claim to the exalted title of poet. What, then, is the mission, what the office, of the poet? In one sense there cannot be a greater mission on earth, than that of a true and Christian poet; of one who, thoroughly imbued with the love of God, and of man, and of nature, has received the glorious gift of pouring forth his lofty conceptions, his fervid emotions, in sweet and glowing song, adapted to awaken in others the thoughts and feelings that agitate his soul. Not that there could be

* See at the close.

an office intrinsically as great and holy as his, who has been duly called and authorized to preach the word of the kingdom. But the poet's office is the greatest in this sense, that none has as wide a scope as his. For while he who ministers immediately in holy things seldom finds a very extensive sphere, and is generally confined to a narrow one, the poet comes to all, the lofty and the mean, the wise and the simple, the virtuous and the vile: he speaks to all alike, and not of his nation alone, but of the whole great family of man; and thousands will pore enraptured over his pages, who would not hear the professed moralist, or the sober preacher of righteousness. Hence the force of the poet's declaration: "I care not who makes the nation's laws, provided I may write its songs."

It is absurd and ridiculous to limit the poet to the fictitious and unreal, as many, and even poets themselves, have done. Not one good reason can be assigned why, as a recent writer* expresses it, "the province of poetry should be the unreal against the real, the fictitious uninclusive of the true;" and it cannot be that those who utter such opinions can ever have devoutly read and pondered the inspired hymns of the sweet singer of Israel, or the poetic effusions of the old covenant prophets. "Poetry," says the writer just quoted, "is universal. It includes every subject; and can no more be restricted in its range, than the Intellect, the Hope, and the Faith of man, of which it is the grandest exponent, and the

* Charles Mackay, in "The People's Journal."

most sublime expression—making Intellect more intellectual, Hope more hopeful, and Religion more religious.”

It is the poet's office, not only to depict the grand and awful, the beautiful and agreeable, or to lead the less gifted to their true enjoyment; but to search into the nature, and to explore the hidden meanings, of things, of the various affairs, relations, and vicissitudes of human life; to pierce the deep recesses of the human heart, and bring to light its evil and its good; its base desires, its guilty passions; its purest aspirations, and its holiest hopes, and to give them utterance appropriate and expressive. No subject can be too little or too mean for the poet; none, if due reverence and fear guide his pen, too exalted and glorious. But—and this is a requirement to be inexorably insisted on—he must never mix his colors so as to produce incongruities, such as Horace describes in his epistle to the Pisos,—never place his subjects in a false light. He may exaggerate the little and the mean, and make vileness doubly vile, and paint sin with undiluted blackness; he may invest all things beautiful, and noble, and good, with every attractive grace, and exhaust his fancy to cover them with winning charms; but he must be unswervingly faithful to truth, to the real nature and fitness of things. Let him beware how he renders wisdom, or virtue, or benevolence, an object of suspicion, if not of dislike and contempt: while he seeks to inspire us with pity toward the corrupt and guilty, let him never attempt to palliate, to cover with deceptive tinsel, their corruption and guilt:

and, above all, let him beware how he invests impurity and vice, wickedness and crime, with attractions, adapted to deceive and pervert the innocent and pure, to allure and charm the prurient and vicious, and to supply the guilty with a cloak of falsehood.

Whatever the poet's genius may originate, whatever his fancy may create, in the secret recesses of his own soul, he comes before the public subject to the same laws as other artists. If the painter or the sculptor should exhibit to the gaze of men lewd scenes, and obscene groups, and then seek to apologize for the immoral character of his works, by saying that they are executed with matchless skill, that they are perfect achievements of art, we should tell him that he who asks us to accept of beauty of form, and elegance of attitude, as an excuse for moral deformity and vileness, insults the common sense, and every nobler feeling of mankind. Man lives for greater, higher, better ends, than mere amusement at the expense of every other consideration and interest. Nay, the form is truly valuable only as it subserves these greater and nobler ends. And hence the poet greatly, wofully errs, who imagines that his genius may be exercised, his artistic skill displayed, with a view simply to amuse and delight his age, without regard to that culture of the heart, which is to help man onward in his pursuit of those great and momentous purposes for which he lives. And therefore, while it were folly to deny that the poet should, nay must, aim at the highest excellence of artistic representation, at

the utmost finish and elegance of form or style, these are yet to be ranked as subordinate requisites ;—requisites, indeed, but only subsidiary to the more favorable acceptance of what they are designed to embody and transmit, the thoughts and feelings of which they are the vehicles.

No beauty of form can ennoble vice, but goodness and virtue, although extraneous attractions may serve to commend them more readily to the favor of men, shine by their own light, and win the admiration and esteem of the wise and good, nay, often command the respect of the corrupt and vicious, even though they present themselves in the homeliest guise.

The poet, then, has no right to plead the perfection of artistic skill as a justification of the debasing and demoralizing tendency of his productions : he has no right to debauch the public mind, to corrupt the moral sense of mankind, and then come forward, and attempt to vindicate his fiendlike achievements, on the ground that they have been accomplished with all the matchless ingenuity, and skill, and power, that genius could inspire. The poet's great mission is to instruct mankind ; to exalt, to beautify, to ennoble human life. He must unfold to men's minds the inward and more mysterious life and relations of nature, animate and inanimate, in the most sublime and magnificent, in the most minute and delicate objects of this glorious creation. He must arouse, and guide man's mind to the perception of the more hidden and spiritual meanings of this

his wonderfully varied life on earth. He must give sweetly gentle, or mightily gushing utterance, to the kindest affections and sympathies, or the loftiest aspirations, the purest desires, the holiest hopes of the human soul. He must teach his fellow-man to hear the voice of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, as it speaks to every attentive ear in the language of universal nature ; and to trace the operations of infinite justice, guided by unerring wisdom, tempered by boundless benevolence, in the dealings of Providence with individual and social man. He must aim to render truth lovely and attractive, and to set forth virtue in all her native charms and winning graces ; and to portray the unvarnished and ungilded deformity of vice, only that it may be abhorred, both in its inward nature, and its outward manifestations. A *vates* in a higher and better sense than the ancients knew, he should lead onward and upward his race to increasing admiration, reverence and love for Him that sitteth on the throne of the universe, to more devoted attachment and allegiance to Him who tabernacled among men, full of grace and truth. And to the prosecution and attainment of these great and glorious ends he must bend all the powers of his genius, and apply all the discoveries of science, and direct all the contrivance and skill of art. It matters little how lavish he be of the adornments of his noble art, if only they be employed to render what is beautiful, sublime, and glorious, more appreciable and attractive, more lovely and delightful to man, or that which is mean and vile, an object of deeper horror and disgust.

We shall conclude this statement of what we deem essential to poetry, with what Dr. Johnson beautifully says, in his *Rasselas*, concerning its instrumentalities and adornments. "In a poet no kind of knowledge is to be overlooked. To a poet nothing can be useless. Whatever is beautiful, and whatever is dreadful, must be familiar to his imagination. He must be conversant with all that is awfully vast or elegantly little. The plants of the garden, the animals of the wood, the minerals of the earth, the meteors of the sky, must all concur to store his mind with inexhaustible variety ; for every idea is useful for the enforcement or decoration of religious truth ; and he who knows most will have most power of diversifying his scenes, and of gratifying his readers with remote allusion and unexpected instruction." Now, if it be conceded that the views which we have here advanced, and which, we cannot but believe, coincide with those of the great moralist and poet whom we have just quoted, are correct and just, it will not be difficult to decide on the respective claims of Schiller and of Goethe, to the admiration and gratitude of mankind.

Thus much must be acknowledged, at the outset, that in the views just expressed we have, for ourselves, entirely renounced that stand-point from which the majority of critics, and among them Thomas Carlyle, who have found every thing to admire and applaud, and nothing to censure and condemn, in Goethe, have viewed that poet. Those men, obviously, consider him solely

as an artist, and cannot, if they would, ascribe to him any higher purpose than the attainment of the utmost artistic excellence. Carlyle, indeed, ventures to talk of his ethics, and his religious belief; of his moral and religious character; but his lucubrations on this subject are so replete with that flippant latitudinarianism, that loose-robed, slipshod, all-justifying charity, which have found such general favor among the literary men of our day, as to disgust all sober-minded men, to whom morality and religion are words of deepest and holiest meaning. For ourselves, we know of neither morality nor religion, other than the sacred Scriptures teach; and what is not derived from and conformed to this divine standard, we most explicitly repudiate. With the heathen poets of classic antiquity we have here nothing to do; although, when we consider the light which they had, the piety and morality of many of them are immeasurably superior to those of many, who flourished within the last two centuries. We are speaking of a poet, who wrote among, and for, a people professedly Christian, and who has exerted, and continues to exert, a boundless influence not only on the public mind of Germany, but of other enlightened nations. And our present inquiry is, what is the nature of this influence? On its religious aspect we intend to be brief. We decidedly take the ground that the poet, who either entirely ignores the volume of inspiration, or treats its great doctrines, and its exalted characters with disrespect, and even perverts and distorts them, that they may harmonize with his philoso-

phic notions, and his pliant ethics, cannot be esteemed a Christian poet, and that his influence on the religious character of the community is, as far as it goes, a mischievous one. But, if Goethe explicitly denied the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, viewing them as the repeatedly revised productions of erring men, and summarily rejecting, as apocryphal, whatever in them *he* could not perfectly understand or approve; if he represented their fundamental doctrines as sectarian jargon, or dismissed them, authoritatively, as absurdities; if he repulsed, even in his old age, every effort of faithful friendship to induce him to give the greatest of all subjects his serious consideration, with either silent contempt, or a biting epigram; if he publicly declared that religious books were productive of illiberal opinions concerning human and divine things, and only worried him; and if, lastly, he substitutes for the great body of divinity contained in the sacred volume, a rude conglomeration of the transcendental and the practical, which he styles the ethnical and the philosophical religions, “for the former of which the pictures have been composed from the Old Testament, for the latter from the New;” if all this is unquestionably true of Goethe, in what sense can we regard him as a Christian poet? The truth, undoubtedly, is, that Goethe, like so many learned men of our age, was a pantheist; and as it was his deliberately announced opinion, that “religion, among other moral influences, rules only the surface of civil society,” so he, quite consistently, gave himself no farther concern

about its doctrines or its duties. For ourselves, we would rather encounter the frivolous drollery of Bürger, and the daring impiety of Byron, than the sardonic sneer, the haughty condescension, and the self-complacent smirk of Goethe, when he deals with sacred subjects.

On his poetic genius, in general, we shall not dwell at any length, as it is our main object to exhibit the influence which his life and writings are calculated to exert on society. We have not the slightest inclination to deny that Goethe possessed extraordinary poetic talent. He was gifted with nearly every requisite to form a great poet. With the most profound, clear, and comprehensive perception of the poetical phases of nature and of human life, of the material available for poetic representation, inherent in whatever objects, or scenes, or social developments met his observation; with an imagination of inexhaustible wealth, and a fancy of boundless fertility, vast in its breadth, though by no means in its upward tendencies; with an intuitive recognition of secret sympathies, and of concealed connections, between objects and manifestations seemingly wholly dissimilar; with a calm judgment, a severely correct taste, which enabled him to arrange in harmonizing groups poetic elements, that to many would appear discordant and antagonistic; and with a discrimination, which seldom failed to detect whatever was purely prosaic and intractable; with a cautious coolness, which does not lose its equilibrium even in stormy scenes of excitement, he combines a skill of

representation, a command of language, an easy flow of style, unrivalled in its simple beauty and its calm repose, a power over all the various forms of poetic representation, perhaps never excelled. Viewing him merely as a poet, it seems to us that his chief defect is, that he is too unimpassioned; he has no enthusiasm, no fire; he appears every where as the unconcerned, shrewd observer, speculating in the poetic material of every nation under the sun, himself unmoved by the emotions to which he gives utterance, or the stirring scenes which he portrays;—excepting always when his subjects are sensual, licentious, and obscene:—for in such he seems to have taken the most intense delight, introducing them on every convenient occasion; or ever and anon *making* occasion for them, to gratify the vile propensities of his impure soul.

It is with sorrow that we say such bitter things of a poet, whose extraordinary gifts might have made him the greatest benefactor of his age. But, as we have already said, we are not singular in our opinion of Goethe. Among the numerous writers, who have fearlessly exposed the corrupt character, and the demoralizing tendency of his writings, the most recent, and perhaps the most discriminating and just in his unsparing severity, is the distinguished German critic, Wolfgang Menzel; and to his profound, elaborate, and brilliant work on German literature, we refer those who would see Goethe's poetic character drawn, in all its variety of feature and expression, by a master hand.

Under different circumstances we might consider it a duty to show, in detail, that we have not unadvisedly and unjustly charged Goethe with an intense predilection for the impure, the licentious, and obscene, in thought and imagination, in principle and life. But our hearers need not fear, that, while we condemn, we shall shock their taste or modesty, by retailing what we censure. We shall neither specify nor analyze, but merely indicate localities. Goethe's lyrics, epics, ballads, and other minor poems, are comparatively free from the moral blemishes, which so often startle and offend the reader of his writings, though even here they are sufficiently abundant. It is chiefly in his novels, his dramatic pieces, and even in his travels, that the pruriency of his imagination, and the utter corruptness of his heart, are manifested. Distinguished as these productions are for artistic excellence, and elegance of style, they either present frequent and gross offences against common decency and morality, or entire works set at defiance every thing like correct principle, and cast off all respect for those lovely virtues, those sacred duties, whose strict observance is all-essential to human life, if it is to be, we shall not say beautiful and pure and holy, but barely human, and which the Creator has constituted the very foundation, not only of the happiness, but of the very existence of domestic and social life. We have been much gratified to find, that on this subject Menzel, in his profound criticism on Goethe, has expressed, often in almost our own words, the same views which we for-

merly ourselves made public. And, in order to afford our opinions the countenance of such high German authority, we shall now, in preference to any minute discussion of our own, quote a few passages from the work of Menzel. We shall merely say that to us his *Faust*, which is universally regarded as Goethe's greatest work, appears to be an infamous canonization of the genius of wickedness, in the person of Dr. Faust. The great and grave charge which we have often felt constrained to urge against Goethe, is not only that his morality is baseless, hollow, and spurious; not only, that corrupt principle, audacious licentiousness, and unbridled libertinism are rife in his writings, but, that so far from any where expressing any reprehension and detestation of such vices, he revels in their exhibition with the most intense relish; and that he ever seeks to throw around his vicious and wicked characters all that grace, elegance, and fascination, with which poetic genius ought to invest only what is in itself beautiful and good. The vicious and the vile are his favorite heroes. That such a delineation of such characters was simply the result of Goethe's own character, all who know how disgusting was his own private life, will admit; and hence it is distinctly and broadly asserted by Menzel. A very few citations* from that critic must suffice. "Talent," says he, "is universal by its nature, and must prove itself so by the greatest variety of applications. There is nothing in the world to which

* We quote from Prof. C. C. Felton's admirable translation of Menzel's German Literature.

talent cannot give a poetical coloring. The musician very justly affirmed that every thing could be set to music, even a list of names. A poet of talent can perform equal wonders with language. Hence, also, Goethe was so many-sided. He could make every thing, even the smallest and meanest, delightful by the magic of his representation.

“ Here, however, we strike upon the first great sin of the poetry of Goethe. Art must be like an enlightened religion, that makes only what is really sublime, noble, and pure, what is really godlike, the object of worship ; it must not resemble a whimsical Feticism, which turns the little, the vulgar, and the obscene, every thing, in short, into a vehicle of adoration, into an idol. The form must be proportioned, and congenial to the subject. Comic poetry alone is permitted, and only for the sake of comic effect, to travesty what is sublime, and to distinguish a vulgar subject with a grotesque elevation. On the other hand, every seriously intended sentimental embellishment of vulgarity, by means of a pathetic dress, is wholly inadmissible. But Goethe was the first to delineate feeble and infamous characters as interesting, amiable, and even sublime, and to excite a sympathy for the conceited Werther, the mean-spirited worthless Clavigo, the effeminate and coquettish Wilhelm Meister, the sentimental Don Juan Faust, as if these were really the ideals of a manly soul. Since this example was set, German poetry has been overrun with weaklings and scoundrels who pass for heroes.

“To this highly unpoetical difference between the beautifying form and the ugly substance belongs also the manner, which had its origin with Goethe, of representing common, vulgar, and little matters, or things that are absolutely dry, prosaic, and tedious, by means of an affected air of importance, as full of meaning, and captivating to the senses. I will here only allude to the ‘Toilet of the Man of Forty Years.’ Goethe was fond of mystifying his readers by such means, and of putting them, as it were, to the proof how much they could bear without grumbling.

“Beautiful nature is the only object, the imitation of which by the serious poet pleases us, and deformed nature ought to be exclusively the subject of comic and humorous poetry; but Goethe staked his whole reputation upon making deformed nature, with all seriousness, pass for beautiful, by the aid of his powers of representation; and we need only read the work written by Falk, on Goethe’s life, or the *Taine Xenia* and aphorisms of Goethe, and some passages of his ‘Faust,’ to be convinced what diabolical fun his readers made him, when they allowed themselves to be so easily duped, and were rapt into wondering admiration and reverence, if Goethe mysteriously thrust out his tongue, twisted his features into a grimace at the highly respectable assembly, and, like Mephistophiles, made an indecent gesture.

“Nothing characterizes him better than the poem with which the *Musen Almanach* of 1833 was opened. He there insults his senseless worshippers by a strain of

coarseness and indecency which is too vile to be repeated here. To this length of impudence Goethe ventured to go with the German people."—Vol. III. pp. 30–32.

In another place the same writer says : " Even Plato reprobates, with severe earnestness, the desecration of poetry by laying open unnatural lusts. He reproaches Hesiod and Homer for relating so many obscene and disgusting things of the gods. He says with perfect truth, ' Even if such things exist in nature, they ought not to be related in the hearing of young people, but should be silently passed over, more than any thing else whatever. If a necessity should ever occur to speak of them, these things must be heard not otherwise than as mysteries, by as few as possible, who should have brought beforehand for sacrifice, not a miserable pig, but some great and costly offering, to the end that as few as possible may have an opportunity of hearing about such matters.' It is true that the mysterious affinity of choice, the principle of conjugal infidelity,—it is true that licentious enjoyments, such as are described in ' Stella,'—really occur in nature, but they are excrescences ; and we should not allow ourselves to be deceived about nature, or rather about the nature of these things, by a captivating poetical embellishment, by confounding them with the most sacred feelings of pure love ; for, as Plato proceeds to say, ' No one is willing to admit a lie into the noblest part of himself, and with respect to the highest things.'

" We have yet to speak of the cruelty which accom-

panies refined pleasures. Goethe has a predilection for painting human weaknesses and prejudices, and feasts upon the sufferings that have their origin there. It is so with 'Werther,' 'Clavigo,' 'Tasso,' 'The Natural Daughter,' 'Elective Affinities,' and others. The cruel pleasure consists in this, that the poet amuses himself with crimes and sufferings, and makes not the least atonement for them whatever. This cruelty oftentimes seems aimless, often merely involuntary, as the consequence of the indifference with which the poet contemplated the world. The calmness and clearness with which Goethe draws his pictures, look frequently like perfect indifference, and not like the godlike repose which springs from the fullness of the idea. It has the effect, therefore, of the lifeless laws of nature, and not of the inward satisfaction of the soul. Hence Goethe offers so many discords which have no solution."—Vol. III. pp. 43-45.

Many other striking passages might be cited from Menzel, but we are already trespassing on the patience of our hearers, and we must bring this part of our discussion to a close. We shall abstain from all remarks on his own life, which, as we have good reason to assert, was positively infamous. Nor can we dwell on other objectionable features of his character, either negatively or positively displayed in his writings: on his utter heartlessness, his profound egotism, his superlative vanity, his supreme and contemptible selfishness, his self-exaltation and self-worship, his aristocratic hauteur and insolence, his languid effeminacy. To one most bitter reproach he

lies open,—an utter want of patriotism, which led him to maintain a cold, stiff, silent reserve, at a time when his country was trodden into the dust by the foreign invader and oppressor, when the whole great heart of Germany was swelling and bursting with wounded pride, nationality, resentment, and ardent aspirations for the recovery of freedom; when the whole land resounded with the voice of the noble and the brave, with the tramp and thunder of armies, and the indignant strains of patriotic poets. Amid the convulsions that shook Germany from the Rhine to the Vistula, the voice of her first poet was not heard. It was heard only in feeble and drivelling commonplaces, when the storm was overpast.*

Had Goethe realized the exalted and momentous nature of the poet's office and vocation, how great and glorious might he shine on the literary firmament, revolving among orbs of like magnitude and splendor, around the sun of truth and wisdom; but now, how dark and sinister is his aspect, how lawless his orbit, how malign his influence!

We gladly turn from this contemplation, to gaze awhile at another luminary of a far purer and brighter light.

Schiller was not made, as Goethe in a great measure was, by outward circumstances and influences, but his genius developed itself, and struggled upward to the commanding position which it attained, in spite of

* See Note at the end.

circumstances the most depressing, of influences the most adverse. He was not, as Goethe often was, an imitator, but he chose his own ground ; evolved, by the independent exertion of the gifts and strength that were given him, his peculiar poetic characteristics, his own artistic principles and excellences ; and his very first and youthful appearance before the public was a stern, though rash and ill-judged, antagonism to existing tendencies. Looking at the whole man, as he presents himself in his life and writings, he was one of the noblest and brightest appearances in the literary world. The sins of Goethe can in no wise be laid at his door. Modest, unassuming, and retiring, he arrogated no lofty and insolent airs, paraded no egotistical self-worship, nor ever usurped an overbearing dictatorship over the republic of letters. Animated by an ardent love of truth, and of virtue, and of his race, he was ever an earnest man, pursuing, with steadfast purpose, the noble and the true. He was never guilty of levity or frivolity ; for this he had too much self-respect, too serious a regard for the sacredness of virtue, too profound a conviction of the grave significance of human life and human relations. His own life had for him too deep a meaning, that he should ever have wasted his time and strength on capricious trifling, or in impertinent frivolity. With intense ardor, and indefatigable industry he studied the great principles of his noble art ; and strove, with sleepless activity, to attain the highest excellence in their application, in the production of imperishable

works. It is true that, considered as an artist, Schiller was inferior to Goethe. He had not the same command of material, nor the same ready skill in arrangement and combination. His prose has not the easy flow, the magic melody of Goethe's; it is throughout more elaborate and ambitious, perhaps too uniformly majestic and stately, but, at the same time, decidedly more correct, and, in general, admirably adapted to the important subjects of which he treats, full of life, and vigor, and idiomatic nerve, abounding in great thoughts, striking comparisons, and happy metaphors. But he ever had a purpose beyond the perfection of art, greater than the attainment of mere literary fame. He sought to instruct, to ennoble, and to elevate mankind. His aim was, to make the beautiful, whether in nature, or in humanity, more attractive; to awaken admiration of the powerful and sublime; to set forth the influence of the mightiest affections and passions that rule the heart of man; to portray earnest men and women, characters full of energy, whether of vice and wickedness, of bold and ruthless ambition, of dark and remorseless tyranny, of gloomy and bitter despair; or of disinterested friendship, of true and self-devoting love, of single-minded philanthropy, of pure and fervent patriotism, of unshrinking loyalty to human rights, and liberty, and happiness. He aims to move deeply and strongly, but always in the right direction. He is always serious, and desires that you should be so. The love of the beautiful, and lofty, and virtuous, the abhorrence of meanness, and

frivolity, and vice, which fill his soul, he aims to excite and cherish in his reader. He never sinks into the apologist of vulgarity, and baseness, and crime. He never seduces us into admiration of vicious characters, never prostitutes his poetic powers to invest them with spurious attractions, never condescends to sophistry to palliate their unhallowed deeds ; he never leaves us any choice but to admire and love his purer, nobler, and better creations. The brilliant and fascinating princess Eboli never wins our sympathy or esteem ; the gloomy but majestic Wallenstein, however much we may admire his grandeur, never gains our applause ; the bigoted and malignant Philip commands our utmost detestation ; Franz von Moor excites our deepest abhorrence, and his unhappy brother Karl, though we commiserate his misfortunes, never tempts us to approve his crimes ; and on the other hand, the generous and high-minded Marquis Posa, that beau-ideal of a patriot and philanthropist ; the sturdy and stalwart Tell ; the heroic Max Piccolomini, whose manly rectitude would not yield to the strongest temptation ; the artless, confiding, but strong-minded Thekla, whose inflexible regard for the right and good, leads her to sacrifice to duty even her pure and ardent love ; the maid of Orleans, strong and sublime in her heroic enthusiasm, are all objects that invite our liveliest admiration, our warmest sympathy, our sincerest respect and esteem. Whether great in misfortune, or great in power and prosperity, they are truthful embodiments of a genuine and exalted humanity, and

as such they claim from us the exercise of every truly human sympathy and affection.

Let it be remembered that it is not our object to defend either of these celebrated men ; but that we simply intend to compare their respective literary merits, and to attempt a comparative estimate of their moral character, but especially of that influence which their writings are respectively calculated to exert on the religious opinions, and the morals of the community. And, therefore, as we have spoken of Goethe's religious opinions and character, we must not omit this point in our estimate of Schiller. Unlike his celebrated contemporary in this, as in other respects, he gave to this all-important subject his most serious attention. His childhood was passed in a pious home, and the influence of his early education never faded from his heart, however deeply his mind was afterwards imbued with error. Unfortunately, he early became involved in the mazes of a skeptical and false philosophy, and in the prosecution of his philosophic speculations he struggled manfully and anxiously for truthful, solid, and firm convictions ; but he never reached a satisfactory result. Schiller lost his faith and his hope, and doubtless remained a skeptic to the end of his days. As this philosophy exalts human reason into a judge of revelation, so Schiller, in treating of Scriptural subjects, boldly assumed that the sacred writings are uninspired, the work of erring mortals alone. We do not recollect that he says so, but he simply takes it for granted, and deals with Scripture

accordingly. He never shrugs his shoulders, or laughs in his sleeve, or sneers, and then again prates, in the language of mysticism, about religious experiences, as Goethe often does, but betakes himself, with all sober seriousness, to the setting forth of his own views, on the establishment and elucidation of which he bestows a good deal of elaborate reasoning, and no less imaginative surmise, and of wild conjecture. Schiller has written but two treatises on subjects, with reference to which we have no sources of information except the Mosaic records: and of these papers Carlyle speaks in a language of approval and admiration, which is to us quite unaccountable, when we consider what he has elsewhere written of men whose soundness in doctrine, and lofty consistency in practice, have never been open to question. Schiller loved the truth and sought it, and he wrote what, doubtless, he conceived to be true; but it would be difficult to point out any where a more deplorable exhibition of the result at which a mind will arrive, which inclines to philosophic speculation and utterly rejects the sure foundation of faith, and substitutes its own supposed discoveries for the teachings of infinite intelligence and wisdom. Besides the dissertations here spoken of, we recollect but two other pieces, and these are poems, in which Schiller very strongly displays the same spirit, but in an entirely different manner, with respect to the truths of revealed religion. His mind was deeply, violently agitated by that greatest of all inquiries that can employ the human intellect, but we do not believe

that, amid the rolling billows of skepticism, he ever reached the rock of faith, or found safe moorings for the anchor of his hope. As regards the influence upon others of the productions which we have had in view, we doubt whether it ever has been, or ever will be, extensive or deep.

If we consider, in the next place, the poetic genius of Schiller in its entire manifestation, we cannot but admit that it was not as comprehensive or universal as Goethe's; but in the sphere in which he lived and wrought, it far surpassed, in piercing vision, in depth and fervor of feeling, in power of utterance, that of his supercilious friend. He did not diffuse his energies over so large a surface as Goethe, but he dug vastly deeper, and built incomparably higher. Strength and splendor are the characteristics of his imagination. He penetrated into the hidden depths of the human heart, and rent away the veil that often hides human character; and he brought forth what is pure and good in men, that he might commend it to the esteem, and love, and imitation of the world, and dragged their corruptions and vices to the light, that he might loudly proclaim his abhorrence, and speak to the conscience his stern rebuke, and his earnest warning. And here we see the effect of his early training, which inspired him with a profound reverence and love of Christian virtue: for, although he stood on false grounds of belief, his morality is obviously based on principles of Christian ethics. So steadfast was his purpose to exert a salutary influence on society,

that when the public misapprehended the design of his novel, "The Ghostseer," conceiving it intended only to excite surprise and terror, he threw it aside and never resumed it, so that we have it in an unfinished state.

Although we admit that Schiller's genius had not the universality of Goethe's, it would be doing him great injustice if we were to represent his mental character as, in any sense, inferior, or the empire of his mind as at all contracted. He was a man of great and varied learning; his mind was of the highest order, and of rich and many-sided culture. The difference between him and Goethe is striking. While the latter seems at home every where, and handling, with plastic skill, any and every subject that presents itself, and often, indeed, throwing away his skill on subjects purely indifferent and trifling, or even contemptible, Schiller is distinguished for prompt sagacity to discern, and consummate ability to embody the beautiful and the good; for a vastness of power to grapple with all things great, and noble, and strong, and to subdue them into willing subserviency to the exalted purposes of his poetic genius. We may liken Goethe to the botanist, who roves over the whole face of the earth, and gathers into his garden trees and plants of every sort, the beautiful and the uncomely, the fruitful and the useless, the sweet and the nauseous, the salutary and the poisonous, arranging them, with admirable art, in beautiful groups, and in strikingly contrastive juxtaposition, but leaving the thoughtless and unheeding wanderer in its mazes, unguarded

and unwarned to shun the hurtful odor of these plants, to abstain from the death-bearing poison of those trees ; while Schiller resembles the horticulturist, who no less assiduously searches out the floral riches of the globe, but selects only those productions of nature which are distinguished for their lofty growth, their potent energy, their attractive beauty, or their inviting sweetness, transferring them to his magnificent park, his garden disposed in gleaming terraces and fresh with gushing fountains, and his elegant greenhouse, arranging all in beauteous order and harmony, and labelling every noxious tree, and shrub, and plant, to warn the unwary to avoid their touch, to flee their noxious odors and their pestiferous fruits. Schiller's poetry is the worthy exponent of deep and intense feeling ; of lofty principle and energetic purpose ; of strong volition and of vigorous action ; of patient endurance and of calm submission ; of mighty motive and of earnest life whether good or evil, and sometimes of dark and dismal despair ; in a word, of human nature in its most exalted and beautiful, or in its strongest and sternest manifestations. But his aim always is to instruct, and warn, and benefit mankind, to beautify and ennoble human life. And the character of his genius is profoundness, strength, boldness, a perfectly balanced harmony of force, and withal, a full and gushing ardor of youth that never cools or flags. And thus, while Goethe has been the "lion of coteries," and the idol of a learned sect, Schiller has been the favorite of the people, of true men and women from

the throne to the cottage; for all found in his writings the forcible utterance of the feelings and aspirations that dwell in every human heart.

Schiller gloried in ideal contemplations, and in the creation of great and noble ideal characters. Goethe was no more capable of conceiving and bringing out such characters as Schiller's lofty and glorious Posa, or his ardent and heroic maid of Orleans, or his chivalrous and high-souled Max-Piccolomini, or his pure, generous, self-forgetting Thekla, than he was of achieving the Pallas Parthenos of Phidias, or one of Raphael's Madonnas. Some have found fault with Schiller's poetry, because, as they say, there is in it too much philosophy, and too much morality. These complaints are frequently raised by the impure admirers of Goethe's meretricious muse; they deprecate Schiller's mighty influence on the literature and character of his nation; they would have unrestrained license to revel in impure indulgences, under the potent patronage of Goethe, whom, as Menzel declares, Schlegel even presumed to call a god; and "*hinc illæ lachrymæ.*" What has thus been made a matter of reproach, we gratefully accept as the result of Schiller's clear and strong apprehension of the greatness and sacredness of the poet's province. He has never pandered to vicious appetite; he has ever done homage to purity and virtue. What gives him his strongest claim to the admiration and gratitude of mankind is his earnest spirit; his earnest warfare against tyranny, wrong-doing, wickedness, and

corruption ; his earnest vindication and assertion of human rights and liberty ; his earnest advocacy of right, of true nobleness, and of rigid virtue. We have said that his love of truth was intense, his pursuit of it ardent and unceasing. In his uninterruptedly advancing self-culture, he strove to realize a lofty and glorious ideal. And it was his intense application to this great object, his sleepless efforts in the expansion, and culture, and enrichment of his powerful mind, that so speedily wore out his feeble frame, and consigned him to an early grave, when he was yet far short of the exalted aim which he had proposed to himself. And with reference to this trait of his character and life, Goethe has beautifully said :

“ Er wendete die Blüthe höchsten Strebens,
Das Leben selbst, an dieses Bild des Lebens.”

And we need only add, that, in accordance with his exalted principles of thought and action, his life, his personal character, was all that is pure, and noble, and estimable ; distinguished for dignified simplicity, amiable gentleness, modest strength, unswerving integrity, and diffusive benevolence. Though we lament the errors of Schiller the philosopher, and deplore that he never penetrated into the shrine of holiest truth, who can but admire Schiller the man, the poet of honor and of virtue, the faithful and powerful asserter of the rights, the duties, the interests of mankind ?

Gilfillan says, in a recent production : “ Another security for the future triumphs of Poetry is to be found

in the spread of the Earnest Spirit. That such a spirit is coming over the age, men feel as by a general and irresistible intuition. There are, besides, many distinct evidences, and in nothing more so than in the present state of Poetry. Its clouds, long so light and gay, are rapidly charging with thunder, and from that black orchestra, when completely filled, what tones of power and music may be expected!" We believe that this is true, and we hail the omen with joyful expectation. But that, at a time when feeble drivelling, or shameless frivolity, or unblushing libertinism were rife in European literature, Schiller took the lead in this purifying and reforming movement, and first sounded the trumpet to summon the poets of Christendom to aid him in this magnificent concert, and that not from accident, or calculation, and expediency, but because his strong and noble spirit disdained all other work or companionship, this is the greatest glory of his imperishable name.

NOTES.

Page 2. For various reasons the writer deems it necessary to state, that he has never seen any unfavorable critique on Goethe's works, except Menzel's: but that there has been in Germany, much and severe censure of his character, and the tendency of his writings, appears abundantly from the bitter complaints and the indignant rejoinders of his worshippers.

P. 21. To the fact that Goethe lies open to this reproach, the writer's attention was, many years ago, directed by a friend and distinguished German scholar. Having afterwards found the accusation broadly made and satisfactorily sustained, by Menzel, he proceeded to strengthen his conviction of its justness, and sought, in vain, to discover in any of Goethe's writings, a spark of true philanthropy, or genuine patriotism. But to this charge, the accomplished American translator of Menzel's German Literature replies, in his preface, as follows: "The example he set of devotion to all the interests of civilization,—of an industry that never tired,—of a watchfulness that never slumbered,—in the regions of art, and poetry, and science,—ought to be received as some compensation for the indifference he is accused of having shown towards what are called the great political interests of the world; for it may well be a question to the reflecting man, whether he cannot minister more successfully to the happiness of the race by recalling their thoughts to the humanizing influence of letters and art, than by plunging headlong into every political controversy which agitates his age." This, and more to the same effect, is doubtless, on the whole, true. We would, however, venture respect-

fully to say in reply, that, while the poet is assuredly not to emulate Sir Matthew Meddle, in perpetually interfering in affairs that do not concern him, we can see no reason why he should, on the other hand, be a Rip Van Winkle, or even a Fontenelle, unconscious of aught passing around him, equally indifferent whether the world be going backward or forward, in prosperous repose, or distracted by tumults, or groaning under oppression. And though it be, and is admitted, that in the ordinary course of affairs the poet should not be found mingling and engaging in the conflicts and the turmoil of the political world, yet circumstances certainly sometimes arise, in which none but drowsy drones, or mere plodding book-worms, or selfish sycophants, can remain silent and inactive; and we do think that the condition, the sufferings of Germany, arising from the wars of Napoleon, were so extraordinary, so highly calculated to rouse every manly and patriotic spirit, that we cannot conceive how any man, not destitute of every noble feeling, of every generous sympathy, could refrain from the utterance of intense indignation,—from the manifestation of the most devoted attachment to the interests of his bleeding country. But, from a selfish voluptuary like Goethe this was not to be expected. The same dispensation which remits to the poet the debt of patriotism, nay excludes him from all interest and participation in his country's affairs, would, of course, embrace all men devoted to letters, or the pursuit of science. And then it should have been said to many, who, in past days, exerted a most salutary influence on public affairs: "You have gone beyond your appropriate sphere,—you must confine yourselves to the seclusion and the occupations of your study." But, not to notice more recent cases, was Franklin less a philosopher—were Davies, and Witherspoon, and Dwight, less reverend and useful divines, because they manifested a deep and active interest in the welfare of this nation, and the success of our great revolution?

"Rectius vives, Licini, neque altum
Semper arguendo, neque, Jum procellas
Cautus horrescis, nimium premendo
Litus iniquum."

Hor. Carm. x. lib. ii.

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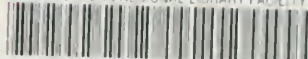
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